



Human Rights Commission Minutes

Date: Wednesday, April 10, 2024

Time: 8:00 PM

Location: 27 Maple Street, Main Hall 1st Floor

Conducted by Hybrid (Remote and In-Person)

This will be a hybrid meeting. Individuals may choose one of the following in-person or virtual options:

1. **Attend in person in the Main Hall on the 1st floor at the Community Center (Senior Center), 20 Academy Street/27 Maple Street. Registration not required for in-person attendance. **

2. ***Notice to the Public on meeting privacy*** In the interests of preventing abuse of videoconferencing technology (i.e. Zoom Bombing) all participants, including members of the public wishing to engage via the Zoom App must register for each meeting and will notice multi-step authentication protocols. Further, members of the public who wish to participate without providing their name may still do so by registering to receive the meeting info and using the telephone dial in information provided.

Present: Co-Chairs Drake Pusey, Griffin Jones; Commissioners Christine Carney, Kristen Bauer, Gary Horowitz, Scott Jones, Rajeev Soneja, Sharon Grossman, Laurie Key

Absent: Kevin Bryant, Crystal Beauchemin

Staff: Jillian Harvey (DEI), Teresa Marzilli (DEI), Colleen Leger (HHS), Chief Julie Flaherty (APD), Sadie Ford (AHS Intern)

In Person Public Attendees: Chadi Salamoun, Dan Goguen, Susan Mortimer, David Fleig, Laura Kleutsch, Noble Larson, Sophie Spink, George Felton, Irwin Grossman, Sarah McKinnon, Mona Mandal, Kaspar Kasparian, Amir Cohn, Laura Handler, Eli Strassfeld, Avi Bukiet, Simon Proekt, Linnea Strassfeld, Miriam Stein, Will Stein, Jeremy Warren

Zoom Public Attendees: Altaf Saadi, Amrutha Rajiv, Andrea Davis, Anju Joglekar, Christina Ahmad, Devorah Klein, Emily Mo, Gabriella Eisner, Judith Pfeffer, Katell Guellec, Ken Barney, Laura Munsey, Leora Zimmer, Marc d'Anjou, Melina Salerno, Michelle Lewis, Nicole Eaton, Susan Barney, Victoria Broniscer, Inbal Prion, Luna Zakon, Nadja Rozovsky, Lina Smith, Ari Akerstein, Jennifer Strassfeld, Beth Melofchik, Poornima Manavalan

Minutes

1. Remote Meeting Notice and Land Acknowledgement
2. Review of March 2024 Meeting Minutes
 - a. Minor edits needed, will handle offline, cosmetic and names
 - b. Motion to approve by Grossman, seconded and one abstention
3. Review of April 1, 2024 Special Meeting Minutes
 - a. Correct spelling of names, and other cosmetic changes
 - b. Soneja motions to accept, Horowitz seconds, 9, motion passes
4. Discussion re: Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza
 - a. Reports from listening sessions are shared and recapped
 - b. **Summary:** timeline
 - i. Took a while to make any statement on the event because of public open meeting law, made a statement in late October after two meetings
 - ii. After complaints were received, co-chairs, commissioner and staff met with members of the Center for Jewish Life, it was a private meeting, heard concerns about word choice and how the statement had potential to hurt people
 - iii. Discussed what was heard at October meeting, discussed strategies to move forward. Commission has not made any statements since because trying to develop ways to respond other than statements
 - iv. At March Meeting, Hingham statement was proposed for AHRC to co-sign, and during community input there was asks from community members to make a proclamation for a ceasefire to be sent to Select Board
 - v. The vote on the Hingham statement was tabled, and in response to the community input, 4 listening sessions took place for as many people as possible to go to the meetings and hear the impact of these international events on Arlington residents

c. Listening sessions

- i. In the listening sessions, there was some dismissiveness from some people against other people
- ii. Question: why hadn't we done listening sessions for other events -
Answer: first time we are trying it
- iii. Thursday Session:
 1. 3 commissioners were able to attend, 13 people spoke
 2. Many references to humanitarian crisis in Gaza, many spoke with pain about their experiences or their family's experiences in the attacks affected them
 3. One person suggested making a sister city for Arlington in the area
 4. One person spoke very dismissively about Palestine
 5. The session was civil, overall people had their space to talk uninterrupted, in a place where others could hear them
- iv. Friday Session
 1. 3 commissioners attended
 2. Common themes, why doesn't the HRC take action, questions about what does the HRC do
 3. Actionable items: taking action in a variety of ways, correcting misinformation, making a broader more balanced statement
 4. Everyone listened to time limits
- v. Saturday Session
 1. 20 people spoke, some thought HRC wasn't doing enough, others thought this issue was outside our scope to even respond
 2. Held meeting open for the full time of 2 hours
- vi. Monday Session
 1. Over 75 people at the meeting, went over the time limit, 2 hours and 35 minutes
 2. Concern about HRC role, why would we be considering writing a statement about global issues even though by-laws state that we should focus on Arlington
 3. Concern about how HRC was responding to this global event but not others
 4. Talk about kids in schools being exposed to islamophobia and anti-

Semitism

5. Some focused on whether we were writing a resolution
6. Concern that we shouldn't only listen to the loudest voices
7. Heard variety of opposing opinions on whether we should write a solution
8. Many discussed how fearful they are about showing their beliefs
9. A lot of anger at the HRC and about us taking it on, or not doing enough
10. Tax dollars are enough of a reason to make a statement
11. Should focus on uniting the town and promoting discourse

vii. Emails received as written testimony

1. Around 70 written responses, had a higher level of toxicity than what people said in the listening sessions
2. Overwhelming feeling of anxiety about this conflict, about how they want to do more, and misunderstanding- people thought that the HRC had created a draft of a proclamation, there is no such draft
3. Some argued it was incredibly relevant to our purview, others mentioned that it wasn't
4. The ceasefire was interpreted in very different ways, wasn't automatically clear that the ceasefire would be bilateral
5. Being able to convince people that Jewish people and the Israeli military government were not the same thing is incredibly important
6. Positive: Building common ground, possibly through interfaith groups, facilitated conversations (HRC has the budget for this), art projects, town program to welcome any new Arlington resident, even if they are just renting, suggestion of highlighting peace workers, spotlighting volunteer opportunities
7. Feedback on how to do the ceasefire proclamation if that was decided on
8. Was a lot of taking the issues personally - > anxiety about safety

d. Discussion of possible actions

- i. Could build on events like the one at the day of learning where there was a discussion about religion and its differences
- ii. Some published response to the listening sessions, could be very simple,

or delve deep into the issues discussed

- iii. Getting a working group, combined between volunteers and commissioners about working on this issue, and responding to islamophobia and antisemitism
- iv. Could hire facilitators to hold discussions on this subject
- v. We hear about anti-Semitism in the schools mostly, we track it and try and help the school address it more transparently
- vi. There was some work on trying to create an interfaith community
- vii. To hold a session for community members, will probably start in the fall to have more education on hate and the forms of hate here in Arlington
- viii. Need people to come to discussions like that with an open mind
- ix. For holding in person events: Logistics have been difficult to plan out
- x. We should work to correct information about the human rights commission
- xi. We (HRC) need to understand our mandate better, we can talk to the town about understanding the bylaws better
- xii. We need to hold sessions for people to learn about antisemitism and islamophobia and how to counter it
- xiii. We need to figure out a way to package the information we've learned from the listening sessions and share it with the town
- xiv. We need to take steps to affirm the fact that whether or not the HRC creates a statement, it will not impact anyone's safety
- xv. One person had mentioned that we needed to take a stand for humanity, no matter how controversial the topic is considered
- xvi. Challenge with listening sessions: Impossible to fact check in real time
- xvii. Many people experiencing pain in Arlington, the Middle East, and around the world, HRC has the right and duty to stand up and speak out against injustice
- xviii. Our mission is to bring the Arlington community together, a no vote and a yes vote on the issue of the ceasefire will make people angry and there is no right answer to this - no matter decision, someone will always be hurt
- xix. We need to think about the differences between humanity and politics
 - 1. A statement like this is outside of the scope of the HRC, we can focus on the pain and suffering in our community from them being affected by this event

- xx. There are opportunities for people to learn more about the scope and scale of the humanitarian process
- xi. Worst thing we can do is giving the impression that we don't care
- xii. When we do give a response, we need to hone in on the problem of this either or problem, rather than the and standing for all human rights in a statement would abide by the warrant article
- xiii. It's time to create a proclamation and touch on points that discuss local problems and action that can follow
- xiv. We can talk to everyone who has written to us and attended the listening sessions in response to their comments, we have a specific scope for our mission
- xv. In the past we have made statements on global events and issues, at some point we decided to suspend statements
- xvi. US tax dollars are essentially enabling the war/genocide to continue
- xvii. The majority of Americans disapprove of Israeli actions, even though we aren't making a statement on the conflict, we should still be able to affirm that we want everyone in the town of Arlington to feel safe and supported.
- xviii. Special town meeting will be voting on a warrant article about a statement about the ceasefire. In the past we have made advisories on other warrants to the select board, like Indigenous People's Day
- xix. Politics and human rights: we can all agree that there is a tragedy in Gaza that can be labelled genocide, but what is our role: to elevate voices and to bring people together.
- xx. Could make this information into a report to bring to town meeting. There was a black lives matter proclamation outside of the town meeting process.
- xxi. The date of the special town meeting about the warrant article is may 8th, select board will meet on 4/17, or potentially on the 4/24
- xxii. The only thing we will probably be able to agree on is a report on the listening sessions to bring to the select board, the select board will put together the language
- xxiii. Broadly affirming human rights is not a political question so we should be able to issue a statement on it. It's within our scope to advise people on the direct impact on Arlington. Could we talk to the people writing a

resolution or proclamation for the select board if they want a commissioner to advise them? Providing the information that we've learned from the listening sessions in some format that would make it easy for the select board to understand the issue

- xxxiv. Before the next select board meeting we should have a report done. We should have a recommendation on how to solve the internal anxiety
- xxxv. We're going to have to have another special meeting after the town meeting warrant is completed so we can look at it and decide whether we want to support it or not
- xxxvi. Grossman makes a motion for a working group to distill information from listening sessions into a report to send to the select board and hold a special meeting to talk about the warrant article; Bauer seconds, Key abstains, 7 yeses, and Soneja is a no

e. Tabled motion: co-signing Hingham statement

- i. Acknowledging the humanity of all Arab and Muslim people in Massachusetts. We couldn't find ourselves to address that because we wanted to address the bigger statement
- ii. 140 countries have voted for a ceasefire
- iii. We've done more work on the subject, there is a little trouble with the last sentence of the statement- Hingham has had a whole string of statements, the current statement we are discussing makes sense for their context, but not for Arlington's context
- iv. Writing the statement could help make people feel better, but it isn't doing anything to help protect human rights
- v. Last bullet of policy memo mentions a statement can be made if it is an advocacy issue or has to do with Arlington, this statement by Hingham is an advocacy issue
- vi. The ask was that we could cosign the Hingham statement, the author of the Hingham statement said we could provide our own addendum so Arlington agrees as well
- vii. **Motion to co-sign to the Hingham statement with an addendum**
 1. We create a small working group to create an addendum to the statement, and we decide who publishes, us or Hingham
 2. Soneja makes motion, Bauer and Grossman vote no, 7 vote yes

3. Suggested actionable thing to do: vote on whether to accept the warrant article- We can't do it because it isn't on the agenda to discuss, we will discuss at the special meeting
 4. We have committed to consider the warrant article.
5. Incidents & Complaints
 - a. There was a school/discrimination/complaint today
 - b. Incident Handling
 - i. April: Commissioner Griffin Jones
 - ii. May: Commissioner Kevin Bryant
 - iii. June: Commissioner Christine Carney
6. NEAT (Neighbors Eating All Together-Arlington) sponsorship
 - a. It was originally created between groups of local Arlington organizations; it is a free community Arlington dinner once a month.
 - b. NEAT has become its own no-profit
 - c. This month's dinner is at Park Ave congregational church on the 13th
 - d. As it's gotten larger, it's been harder for the volunteers to cook the whole meal
 - e. Could sponsor their next meal as a way to outreach, it would be up to 500 out of the events budget
 - f. Could help sponsor an Eid celebration for the Arlington high school up to 500
7. Bauer moves to move rest of agenda next meeting and adjourn Carney seconds, unanimous vote.

9. Adjournment

Next meeting: (Moved to Thursday to accommodate Town Meeting) Thursday, May 16, 2024, 8:00 PM

Anyone needing accessibility information or assistance to attend this meeting should contact Tim Ross at tross@town.arlington.ma.us. This meeting is open to all interested individuals.